

Mathew B. Brady Studio  
625 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-295

HABS  
DC,  
WASH,  
325-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## MATHEW B. BRADY STUDIO

HABS  
DC,  
WASH,  
325-

Location: 625 Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W., Square 460, Lot 802 (original Eastern 22 ft. of Lot 5).

Present Owner: National Savings and Trust Co., trustee.

Present Occupant: The Fraternal Order of Police

Present Use: Private restaurant and bar.

Significance: This small Italianate commercial building is a fine example of pre-Civil War commercial Washington architecture. This building served as one of the first photographic studios in the City of Washington, being put to that use in 1850. From 1858-1881, it housed the National Photographic Art Gallery and the studio of the world renowned photographer Mathew B. Brady. Brady is remembered for his photographs of the Civil War and the many portraits he took of famous personages of that era.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: It is not possible to pinpoint the exact date of construction for this building. The Corporation of Washington Tax Books record a significant increase in value of improvements from \$3,800.00 in 1854 to \$7,500.00 in 1855. Prior to 1854 the value of improvements remains relatively constant as far back as the mid-1830's, when the Tax Books are too unclear to interpret accurately. Stylistically, the two street facades represent different eras. The elaborate design of the Pennsylvania Avenue facade dates it at around the time of the Civil War, whereas the simplicity of the C Street facade is characteristic of the 1830's and 1840's. It may be possible that the structure was originally built in the 1830's, and underwent major alterations, including a new facade, in 1854-55 (when its western neighbor with identical facade was probably built).
2. Architect: The original architect of the building is unknown, as are the architects for the major alterations to the structure.
3. Original and subsequent owners: William H. Ward was the original owner of this structure. He died in 1881, leaving all his property and possessions to Mary M. Ward, his wife, to be passed on to his children, Mary Joyce and Annie Ward, at the time of his wife's death. His will was filed in probate on the 16th of September 1881, Administration #657. It was impossible to determine the chain of title from the Ward family to the

next recorded owner, Nannie Yulee Noble, who owned the property from the turn of the century until her death in 1923. Mrs. Noble left all property to her daughter Yulee Noble Miles. The National Savings and Trust Company was named as the co-trustee for the property. (Administration #37134, 3 March 1923). The National Savings and Trust Company still manages this property for the Noble family trust.

4. Alterations and additions: According to records of the early photographers in Washington, cited in Josephine Cobb's article in The Records of the Columbia Historical Society, daguerreotype artists and photographers who leased this building during the 1850's installed a major skylight and reconstructed the sidewalls of the building to provide adequate light for their photographic studios.

During Mathew Brady's tenancy (1858-1881), the fourth floor of the building was significantly remodeled as witnessed by the change in door moldings. Both halves of the building were divided into three rooms at this time.

A permit was applied for on the 11th of August 1881 to make general repairs and alterations to the building for an estimated cost of \$2,500. The large southwest room may have been subdivided north to south at this time. (Building Permit #168.)

B. Stanley Simmons, FAIA, who established an architectural firm in Washington in 1889, designed the storefront window modifications in 1901. (Building Permit #329, 20 August 1901.)

In 1907, major remodeling was performed on the lower floors, which included the removal of wood flooring on the first floor and its replacement with tile, the rearrangement of the stairway from the first to the second floor, the installation of marble wainscoting on the first floor, and the installation of marble columns on the first floor (which have since been removed). This work was performed under the direction of the architect Albert W. Auult at an estimated cost of \$5,000. (Building Permit #2392, 2 February 1907.)

On December 11, 1924, a permit was applied for to alter the rear store on the first floor and to remove and replace old joists. (Building Permit #5695, 11 December 1924.)

#### B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

During the mid 1800's, many photographers lived in the area near the intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue and 6th Street, N. W. From 1850-1881, 625 Pennsylvania Avenue was used as a daguerreotype and photographic studio. N. S. Bennett was the first daguerreotype

artist to occupy the upper floors of the building. The studio was next used by Marcus A. Root and John H. Clark of Philadelphia, who installed a large skylight in the rear of the building. The skylight was considered the latest method to aid in the production of daguerreotypes. A photographer by the name of John Goldin rented space in the building in 1858. James A. Cutting, who made important contributions to the development of photography in the field of collodion-bromide techniques, also rented space for a short time. Mathew B. Brady, who rented the top three floors of the building from 1858-1861, was the final photographer in the building.

Mathew B. Brady (circa 1823-1896) was a world renowned photographer with an established gallery and studio in New York prior to opening Brady's National Art Gallery and Studio in Washington, D. C. Brady studied photography under the American photographer Professor Morris, a close friend of the French photographer Daguerre. Brady is remembered for his images of the Civil War and the many portraits of famous national and international leaders.

Brady's National Art Gallery was run by a succession of photographer/managers. Among these were: Alexander Gardner (who later opened his own photographic gallery on the corner of 7th and D Streets in Downtown Washington), James F. Gibson, and Andrew Burgess. Brady's gallery was open to the public everyday but Sunday. Examples of work currently being completed were displayed at the rear of the building on C Street. The second floor reception rooms were hung with portraits of some of the famous people Brady had photographed. The studio for sittings was on the top floor of the building. Brady had this floor altered significantly for his photographic studio. He also altered the lighting method for this floor. The three windows in the north facade were removed and replaced with four narrow windows to form what Brady referred to as his "window wall". Interior windows were inserted in the walls of the stairwell to allow light from a skylight to enter the interior eastern rooms.

Due to a series of bad managers and lack of active control by Brady, the gallery was totally run-down by 1860. Brady attempted to run the gallery and studio himself, but outstanding mortgages closed the gallery in November of 1861. Brady continued to work out of other locations and for other photographers until his death fifteen years later, in 1896. Directory research and physical inspection of the building indicate that the uppermost story of the building remained unoccupied after Brady's departure.

Sweeney, Rittenhouse, Fant & Co. Bankers, later known by the names Rittenhouse, Fowler & Co. Bankers and Fant, Washington & Co., occupied the ground floor of 625 Pennsylvania Avenue during the time Brady occupied the upper floors. Two men's clothiers, Noah Walkert & Co. followed by A.E. Francis, rented the building for eight years following the departure of Mathew Brady and the banks. The building became a restaurant in 1915 and remains as

such today. The longest tenant during the 1900's was Atlantic Lunch. The current lease is held by the Fraternal Order of Police who use the 1st and 2nd floors as their private club and restaurant. The 3rd and 4th floors are vacant.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This building is one of two adjoining pre-Civil War Structures which have similar Renaissance Revival facades with Romanesque Revival detailing. The resulting facade composition has considerable vitality and intricacy of detailing. Its scale relates to the neighboring Gilman's Drug Store, St. Marc Hotel (Apex Liquor Store), and the Atlantic Coastline Building making the square a strong element in the older Washington commercial district.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in poor condition due to inadequate maintenance and fire which damaged the northern half of the third floor.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The site contains 1,600 square feet. The building has 22' of frontage on Pennsylvania Avenue and on C Street. The east wall of the structure is perpendicular to Pennsylvania Avenue for 36.64', turns and continues perpendicular to C Street for 39.83'. The west party wall is perpendicular to C Street for 36.39'. It turns to run perpendicular to Pennsylvania Avenue for 32.56' until its intersection with Pennsylvania Avenue (see attached floor plan). The structure is four stories in height plus a basement. Floor to ceiling heights are slightly greater on the first and second stories.
2. Foundations: Brick.
2. Walls:
  - a. South facade: The south facade (Pennsylvania Avenue facade) is constructed of brick laid in running bond. The composition is a three bay arrangement between slightly projecting piers. A belt course, supported by pendant shaped consoles at each end, separates the third from the fourth story. A decorative, recessed cast iron panel is directly beneath the sills of each of the third story windows. A crenelated brick molding is above each round-headed window. The crenelation is polygonal on the fourth and second stories and curved on the third story. The ground floor has a projecting storefront with a recessed center entry.

- b. East facade: The eastern wall of the building consists of two brick bearing walls. The outer one was the wall for a structure which stood to the east but has since been razed.
  - c. North facade: The north facade is constructed of brick laid in running bond with a four bay storefront at the ground floor and a three bay fenestration pattern on the second and third floors. The outer edges of the fourth story continue the brick facade of the second and third stories but the center section has been filled with wood sheathing.
4. Structural system, framing: Wood joists spanning east to west between the common bond load bearing brick walls are parallel to the front facade in the front half of the building and parallel to the rear facade in the rear half of the building. A beam, originally supported by nine columns of which one has since been removed, runs parallel to the west wall through the center of the basement. A cast-iron I beam, supported by two cast-iron pipe columns, supports the north 25' of the basement ceiling structure. The southern portion of the structure is supported by wooden columns and beams. The fourth floor ceiling structure was cut for a skylight in the northern half of the roof. The northern end of this skylight rests on piers projecting from the north wall, but there is no apparent support for its southern perimeter.
  5. Balcony, storefronts: The Pennsylvania Avenue storefront has a heavy, bracketed, metal cornice as its crown. Wooden shingles cover the lower portion of the storefront, which has now been boarded over.

Historic photographs show an iron railing on the second story of the Pennsylvania Avenue facade on top of the projecting storefront. It was removed when the storefront was altered in 1901.

The C Street storefront is divided into four bays by sandstone piers. A heavy sandstone lintel is carried above the window bays with a wooden lintel over the door. The westernmost window has a brick panel beneath it rather than the sandstone panel of the two center windows. The simplicity of the C Street facade is significantly different from the intricately detailed Pennsylvania Avenue facade. Its styling and simple details appear to corroborate the early construction date of this building.

6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The south facade of the building has a center wooden door set within the projecting storefront. The C Street entrance has a wooden door.

- b. Windows: The center bay of the south facade is composed of pairs of semi-circular arched windows, separated by cast iron colonettes the height of their spring line. Single, semi-circular arched windows are located in the narrow outer bays of the south facade. The double-hung sash have four-over-four lights on the third and fourth stories and four-over-six lights on the second story. The frames and trim are wood.

The north facade has three four-over-four light double hung sash on the ground floor. There are three double hung windows on the second and third stories which, except for a six-over-one light sash located in the center opening of the second story, have been boarded up. A brick soldier course forms the lintel for the second and third story windows. All have wooden sills. The three windows of the fourth story have been replaced by four narrow one-over-one light, double hung windows which are remnants of Mathew Brady's "window wall" installed in the mid 19th century. The wooden sills of the three original windows still remain.

#### 7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: A flat, metal roof was original to the building. The roof is currently covered with asphalt and gravel. Two skylights are centrally located in the northern half of the building. Access to the roof is by a scuttle located in the center of the fourth floor adjacent to the east wall.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The top cornice of the south facade has been removed and replaced with sheet metal. The original cornice is pictured in both photographs referred to in Section III.1.

#### C. Description of Interior:

##### 1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement floor plan: The basement has an open plan. A stair is located in the northwest corner and a furnace is located in the southern portion of the space.
- b. First floor plan: The entrance from Pennsylvania Avenue opens into a small vestibule area which in turn leads to the main dining room occupying three fourths of the first floor. The stairs to the second floor and basement are located in the northwest corner of the building. The kitchen is located to the north of the dining room.

- c. Second floor plan: The second floor has been altered from its original plan. It now contains two equal size offices at the southern end of the floor. The center portion of this floor is divided into two open rooms separated by a wide opening. A stair to the third floor is enclosed along the west wall of the northern of these two rooms. Two small bathrooms are in the rear of this floor.
  - d. Third floor plan: A narrow stairhall at the bend of the building divides the third floor into two rooms which are connected by doorways adjacent to the west bearing wall. The northern room contains the stair from the second floor.
  - e. Fourth floor plan: The fourth floor originally had a plan similar to that of the third floor, as it is witnessed by the door trim of the doorways adjacent to the west bearing wall. This trim is similar to that of the third floor and the exterior windows, and dissimilar to the rest of the architraves on this floor. (Refer to Section C.6 Decorative features and trim.) The hallway has been altered to form a cross. The short arms of the cross connect the stair at the center of the east wall with a raised plumbed area to the west of the stair. A long north-south corridor bisects the shorter corridor terminating at doors into the northwest and southwest L-shaped corner rooms. Two smaller rooms along the east wall complete both the north portion and the south portion of the floor plan. (see sketch plan.)
2. Stairways: A straight run, open, wood stair runs up along the west wall between the basement and the first floor kitchen.

There is a dog-leg stair in the northwest corner of the building which connects the first floor dining room to the second floor. The balusters are encased in plywood paneling. It has a wrought iron handrail.

A straight run stair rises to the north along the west wall connecting the second floor with the third floor. The stair has wood treads, risers, handrail, turned balusters, and a massive wood newel post all of which may be original. A wood dog-leg stair, perpendicular to the eastern wall of the building, connects the third to the fourth floor. The balustrade is missing. There is a platform above this floor which is reached by a wooden ladder from the fourth floor corridor. A second ladder provides access from the platform to the roof of the building.

3. Flooring: The northern half of the basement floor is a concrete slab. The southern half has rough brick paving laid directly on earth. On the first floor, portions of a hexagonal grey and white tile floor, which was installed in 1907, remain. Any other original flooring has been obscured by linoleum and carpet. The kitchen has a quarry tile floor.

The original flooring on the second floor has been covered by linoleum and carpet. The bathroom floor is raised 8" above the original floor. The third and fourth floors retain their original wide board wood flooring. An additional wood floor has been laid on top of the original floor in portions of the northern rooms of the fourth floor. The plumbed area on the fourth floor is concrete which is 4" above the original floor height.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The brick bearing walls and the internal structural system are exposed in the basement. In 1907, a wainscot of 4' x 5' white marble panels was installed around the perimeter of the first floor. In the dining room plywood paneling has been installed above the marble. The kitchen has vinyl or linoleum covering the walls. A suspended acoustical tile ceiling has been installed throughout most of the first floor; remnants of a pressed metal ceiling are along the stairwell.

The second floor has been extensively remodeled. Twentieth century plywood paneling and a suspended acoustical tile ceiling now cover the original finishes.

The ceiling plaster and lath have been removed on the third and fourth floors exposing the floor joists. A fire has burned the walls of the northern room on the third floor. Elsewhere the plaster walls show remnants of several layers of wallpaper. The wallpapers of the fourth floor date from approximately 1860-1885, as identified in Catherine Lynn's Wallpaper in America.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: A swinging door is located between the first floor dining room and kitchen. Hollow core wooden doors are on the second floor. The third and fourth floors have their original wooden paneled doors in the hallway openings adjacent to the west bearing wall. Three light operable awning transom windows are above these doors. The remaining hall doors of the fourth floor are also wood with four vertical panels. They have two light awning transom windows. There is a simple wooden door between the two southernmost rooms of the fourth floor.

- b. Windows: The exterior windows have deep paneled reveals. Paneled shutters with porcelain pulls are set within the reveals.

The walls of the third and fourth floor stairhalls have windows to provide light to the interior eastern rooms. On the third floor there are three light casement windows. On the fourth floor the northern interior window is double hung with six-over-six light sash and the southern interior window has a fixed six light sash.

The fourth floor has two skylights. A new wire glass, gabled skylight is above the stair. A skylight, approximately 15' wide by 30' deep, provided north light to the rear fourth floor photographic studios. The skylight is visible through the ceiling joists. The skylight is gabled with a bullseye opening at each gable end and is glazed with small, overlapping sheets of glass. Buttress piers on the north wall provide support for the skylight. The glass panes are now covered with plywood.

6. Decorative features and trim: On the third and fourth floor different types of baseboard molding, door, and window architraves help to date the time period of the various alterations in the floor plan. The molded baseboard along the west and north wall of the fourth floor east-west hallway match that of the fourth floor stairway and the entire third floor. The profile of the remaining fourth floor baseboards varies slightly.

The third and fourth floor doorways which provide access into the north and south rooms, have a plain fascia and ogee molding. The remaining fourth floor doors have a reeded architrave which was popular in the 1880's. The doorway between the two southernmost rooms of the fourth floor has a simple flat architrave.

Exterior windows have a similar profile to the third and fourth floor door architraves near the west bearing wall. The exterior windows of the third and fourth floor stair hall have the later reeded architraves, as does a built out wall in the fourth floor plumbed area.

Wooden mantels were applied on the west wall in the fourth floor northwest and southwest rooms. The mantels have a segmental arch between the smooth square facings.

Pairs of decorative carved wooden brackets provide visual separation between the narrow L-section of each of these rooms. The brackets of the northern room are fluted on the underside. The brackets in the southern room have curvilinear incised ornament on their triangular face.

7. Hardware: All door knobs are missing. -Door hinges appear to be original. Curtain rods and brackets are above the south windows of the fourth floor.
8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: A large furnace is in the southern portion of the cellar. It serves the lower basement through the second floor of the building. The third and fourth floors have been heated only by stoves. There are flues along the eastern wall in the north and south corner rooms. These have two stove pipe holes; one near the ceiling and the other lower on the wall. The fourth floor has additional flues within the mantel openings. Ornate cast iron grilles with a central star pattern are on the east wall of the third and fourth floor southern rooms.
  - b. Lighting: The cellar, first, second and third floors have been wired for electricity. There are fluorescent light fixtures within the first floor kitchen and second floor ceilings. Incandescent fixtures are in the first floor dining room. The cellar and third floor have exposed incandescent bulbs hanging from the ceiling. The fourth floor contains only the remains of a gas lighting system. Iron pipe gas elbows turn down from the ceiling in the corner rooms of the fourth floor and in the third floor southern room. On the fourth floor, the remains of gas light bracket lamps, dating from circa 1860, are on the north wall of the interior south-east room and the west wall of the interior northeast room. The fixtures are bronze with a fleur-de-lis on the gas cock.
  - c. Plumbing: The second floor plumbing fixtures date from the latter half of the 20th century. Soil pipes and toilet stands are along the east wall of the third floor southern room. At the fourth floor plumbed area, a shower head projects from a wall which has been built out from the original west wall. The remaining piping is against the original west wall.

Prepared by Janet N. Shure  
Anderson, Notter/Mariani  
for Pennsylvania Avenue  
Development Corporation  
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### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### 1. Old Views:

The north side of Pennsylvania Avenue between 6th and 7th Streets, N.W. from a stereopticon view of Washington in 1870. The original belongs to Robert A. Truax, 3629 Legation Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20015.

The north side of Pennsylvania Avenue between 6th and 7th Streets, N.W. in the early 1920's. From the Library of Congress, #LC 122099.

#### 2. Bibliography:

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Window Wall

Flue

Mantel

Skylight

Plumbed Area

Skylight

up

dn

Mantel

Flue

Mathew Brady Studio  
Fourth Floor Plan

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